

Recent developments in open education data in The Netherlands

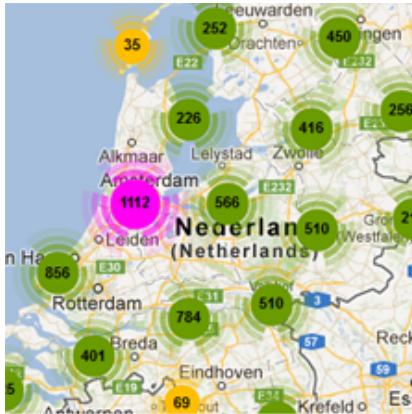
Submitted on 05 Dec 2013 by Reinout van Brakel

Here are some of the recent developments in The Netherlands regarding Open Education Data in the past 6 months, which I found interesting.

1) In November, a new website was launched by the organisation that represents primary schools in The Netherlands. The website "Schools on the map" shows data from the Inspectorate and the central agency of the Ministry of Education, and includes data on: inspectorate's judgments, personnel, pupils, and performance on the CITO of the last two years (CITO is the test that most pupils take at the end of primary school). The website was developed by the same organisation that made the website "Venster voor Verantwoording" for secondary schools. Both websites are based on the philosophy that government data should be open, but that schools need to be able to tell their own stories. So for each datapoint, schools get the chance to write an explanation.

See: <http://www.scholenopdekaart.nl/>

2) One of the critiques on these websites run by the schools themselves is that it is not possible to download the data. Therefore, making comparison or additional analysis is not possible. The Open State Foundation, a non-profit organisation advocating open data, succeeded in bringing together 3 main sources of data: data from the Inspectorate, the Ministry of Education and CITO. The data is available on an API and can be used for additional analysis and the development of apps. See: <http://www.openonderwijsdata.nl/>



3) Several commercial applications are being developed based on open education data. One of applications is aimed to support parents in choosing schools. Often the data is enriched. The website <http://www.scholenkeuze.nl/> gives schools the opportunity to add information like videos, as marketing tools. The site was built by a market research company, which started by giving satisfaction surveys to students and parents. Another interesting application is to support cities with tailor made websites, showing enriched data of school performance.

4) After years of debate, and several schools trying to prevent publication through court, the Ministry of Education decided to give the data of CITO (the central test at the end of primary school) to the press, based on [a formal request done by RTL](#). The news agency used "Wet Openbaarheid Bestuur" is as a legal basis for the request. The scores of each school were analysed and processed by prof. Jaap Dronkers, a sociologist who has been a strong advocate of open education data. He has already been involved in opening up data on secondary schools in 1999.

The debate focused on the abuse of test data, which are intended for advising parents and pupils and for supporting teachers. Now that they are public, the risk of using these test data to benchmark schools is very strong. CITO stressed that the data are not suited for that purpose. The Inspectorate is working on better methods, including measuring the added value of schools. See more [here](#).

Some lessons learned

The first publication of CITO-data contained several mistakes: data were misinterpreted, and this led

to quite some critique. However, some also supported the publication and mentioned that the fact that the entire database, including corrections for socio-economic status and various other variables, is a good way to support the discussion on school choice and quality. Opening up data will most probably lead to the detection of mistakes: that is part of the deal and in the end useful.

When data becomes open, it also is free. For commercial applications this is a challenge, certainly in a field like education, where many think that it should not cost us money. New applications, such as supporting school choices, might be feasible. However, often this information is provided for free as well.

The developments show that there is a lot going on around open data in education. Striking a balance between the interests of several stakeholders is a key challenge. Although several initiatives on open data are now operational, there is still a lot to be gained by opening up data on schools even further. A lot of the current data on schools do not really tell us what the quality of these schools is. The more we open up data, the more it becomes apparent that it is hard to measure school quality at all.